

Increasing International Interest Requires a Quantum Leap in Methodologies for Learning World Languages

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Abstract

“I hate languages...I’m just not good at them, they’re not my thing.” Why is it that so many students dislike their language classes and jump ship the second that they are no longer required to take a foreign language? According to research done by psychologist Dr. James J. Asher there is a 95% drop-out rate across the United States in traditional language classes. Many times, the only students who continue past the one or two required years of foreign language are those who go on to become teachers of the same language, and all too often they only perpetuate the cycle. Despite their pleas of ignorance, it is not the students’ inability to learn and acquire languages that is to blame; rather, it is the teaching methods that cause their reluctance, discontent, and eventual abandonment. Traditional methods often have students sitting silently as they fill out grammar and verb conjugation worksheets or monotonously repeating phrases back to the teacher. Successful language training results in an ability to communicate in the real world. Instruction must provide meaningful contexts for communicating that are interesting enough to keep the attention of students and fun enough to keep them highly motivated. TPR (Total Physical Response), and its branch-off, TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling), are innovative methods that teach students language through body movements, commands, and stories –much like how we learned our first language as infants. MTSU has been on the forefront of research and development of TPRS for the past few years and has become a hub of information and communication for instructors eager to learn how to use it in their own classroom. This summer at the ‘MTSU Summer Language Institute,’ I had the opportunity to begin learning two different languages through TPR and TPRS. This Institute is an accelerated language acquisition program developed by my mentor, Dr. Shelley Thomas. Each session is a week-long intensive course. My article will give a brief history and background of TPR and TPRS, as well as my personal experience with the methods. I will also discuss how MTSU became involved, the unique and unprecedented work that is currently taking place at MTSU, and, finally, what is happening with TPR and TPRS on an international level.

Origins and Background of TPR and TPRS

People have been successfully learning languages other than their own for hundreds of thousands of years. With the advent of globalization, however, a closer look at what constitutes *successful* language learning in the 21st century is necessary. Statistics cited by authors in fields as varied as brain-based learning, psychology, and language acquisition, consistently show high drop-out rates and low fluency levels of students taking foreign languages in the United States (Asher, Jensen, and McChristian). It is not surprising that a resolution passed last year by the U.S. Senate proclaimed 2005 the *Year of Foreign Language Study*. This resolution was

motivated further by grim statistics showing that only 9.3 percent of Americans speak both their native language and another fluently. The report clearly states that the need to successfully communicate in languages other than our own is “a challenge for which we are unprepared” (Lowenkron and Powell).

Industrialized nations have been teaching foreign languages in more or less the same way for generations: sitting at a desk, filling out worksheets, conjugating verbs, and repeating after the teacher. It is a process that takes the most determined students many years while discouraging the majority from ever reaching a proficient level of fluency. Drop-out rates and small gains in fluency speak volumes about students’ attitudes towards languages and how they are being taught. Total Physical Response (TPR) and its counterpart Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) directly address these critical problems of fluency and motivation. They may provide the catalyst needed to revolutionize the way languages are taught in the 21st century.

Though it is often spoken of as a fairly recent method of acquisition, TPR was actually developed over forty years ago. Dr. James J. Asher, professor of psychology at San Jose State University, began doing research on language learning in 1960. Asher explains in the 6th edition of his *Learning another Language through Actions* that TPR was sparked while trying to develop a demonstration of sensory input being converted into information on the first exposure. For example, how can a person “learn” or file something as new, official information after only being exposed to it once? In order to test various possibilities, he enlisted the help of Shirou, a graduate student from Japan, and his secretary, Alice. With Shirou directing them in Japanese, they began playing with commands, repetition, and body movements. After much trial and error, they decided to take a break during which Asher suggested that Shirou give them simple one-word directions that would get them out of their seats. He asked Shirou to give the command, do the action himself, and they would follow without speaking. It worked so well that Shirou began saying the commands without modeling and they were still able to perform without error. Thus TPR was born (1:18-21).

TPR is based on the theory that the learner acquires a second language in the same way that she learns her first language as an infant. As babies, people are exposed to body-language conversations on a daily and hourly basis over a two year period before they even begin forming words, let alone grammatical structures. When they do finally feel comfortable to utter that “baby’s first word,” it is always spontaneous and never forced. Further, before infants get to that point, they often show competent comprehension of their native language. For instance, when a baby is told “Go hug your grandmother,” she will do it, though she may not be able to say what she is doing. As children develop, they learn the grammatical structures of their language through interactions with those around them, whether it be from their parents at home or other children on the playground. This often takes the command form such as “Brush your teeth” or “Give me the ball!” It is this golden tense on which TPR relies in order to build vocabulary. Commands that demand gross body movements such as “Stand up” or “Turn around” get students out of their desks where attention spans wane and allow them to have fun while learning.

In *Joyful Fluency: Brain-Compatible Second Language Acquisition*, Lynn Freeman Dhority and Eric Jensen state that movement, like that practiced in TPR, is essential for whole brain learning. They point out how schools are unintentionally organized in such a way that they do not teach to the whole brain. Worksheets that teach to the test require too much time at the desk. Many schools have dropped gym classes, recess, and subjects like art and drama with the

misguided logic that this will help students to focus more on math and science. Yet, omitting movement and play cripples the brain's capacity to learn. Even the arrangement of classrooms and furniture foster a stagnant learning experience. Dhority and Jensen explain why any subject, especially languages, needs to be learned both mentally and physically:

First, a significant pathway for memory retrieval is through the physical body. This is known as procedural memory. We often recall what something is or what we wanted to do by simply getting up and moving. Second, areas in the brain that activate movement (cerebellum, frontal lobes, basal ganglia, motor cortex, etc.) are also well connected to the pleasure centers in the brain. Motion activates emotion; hence, moving can engage positive feelings and better retrieval. And finally, the peptide molecules which store information are distributed throughout the body. This means that almost any movement or motion can activate feelings and memories. (27)

As Asher continued his experimental classes, he received more government grants in order to create films to show others how well this seemingly simple method of teaching works. An important discovery he made was that the learners were internalizing the new language in *chunks* rather than word-by-word and that the retention was long-term. That is to say, instead of looking at a sheet of paper and attempting to memorize a list of words (chair, table, hand), they were acquiring whole sentences complete with new vocabulary and grammar (sit on the chair, touch the table with your hand, raise your hand slowly). Another amazing discovery was *zero-trial* learning. At one point, Asher asked Shirou to rearrange the vocabulary they had already learned to create new commands that they had not heard yet. For example, if they had learned "Touch the head, touch the table with the pen, touch the head with the pen" in Japanese, Shirou would now perhaps say "Touch the table with the head." To Asher's surprise and joy, they were still able to respond correctly, without ever having heard the new command (1:20-21). These commands are referred to as "novel commands" and they are perfect for not only testing what students have learned, but also building a student's confidence in learning a new language. Often, students will respond with an "Aha!" moment in which they realize how much they have been learning without even trying or being aware of it. Traditional methods that teach the grammar point first and then provide an exercise to practice the grammar point take away the mind's opportunity to make the discovery on its own. This unconscious learning is sometimes mistaken by traditional teachers as not learning at all. They reason that if students cannot perform metalinguistic tasks like conjugating entire verbs or filling in discrete grammar tests, then they do not know the language. Yet, a natural follow-up to an "Aha" moment in both teen and adult learners is to analyze and ask questions about the new discovery as they compare the new language with their own. These grammatical questions may come at different times for different learners, thus the need to focus on communicative methods that continue to produce fluency until such questions arise.

One myth Asher's research on movement helped to dispel was that children are superior to adults in language learning. This misunderstanding has its roots in the accelerated rate at which children often learn a new language versus how slowly adults do. If a family moves to a new country with a language that is foreign to them, it is often true that the child will quickly acclimate to the new language while adults may lag behind for years. Why is this? Children are learning on the playground from their peers via the command form involving body movements

and modeling, while adults are attempting to learn in non-play settings in which language is completely abstract and intangible. An example would be a child hearing “Catch the ball!” and having the ball fly through the air towards them, and an adult being confronted by a stationary person standing in front of them asking “How are you today?” or worse, asking the same thing over the phone. Asher wondered if adults had the opportunity to learn in a playful, relaxed setting like kids, would they be able to learn just as well? After conducting several experimental classes with Russian, Asher got results showing that not only can adults learn on par with children, but they actually excel in language learning and surpass children. The only area in which children show consistent superiority is in pronunciation, where puberty seems to be the “biological marker” for being able to pronounce words like a native speaker (1:31-33).

Asher’s well-documented body of research on the effectiveness of TPR is now accepted in a wide range of disciplines. He has written more than one hundred articles which have appeared in such publications as *Child Development*, *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, *Psychological Reports*, *The Journal of Special Education*, *The Modern Language Journal*, *The International Review of Applied Linguistics*, *The Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, and *Psychology Today*. Over the past 25 years, Dr. Asher has been interviewed by the televised science program *NOVA* and has been invited to demonstrate TPR at several hundred institutes of learning - from elementary schools to universities like Stanford, Texas, New York, Hawaii, Alaska, and Cambridge in England.

Though it still embodies the same basic principles, TPR continues to grow and evolve as educators learn and experiment more. An important outgrowth of TPR resulted from work done by Blaine Ray, a high school Spanish teacher from Bakersfield, California. Ray took TPR a step further by changing the command form to the narrative form and creating small stories. This allowed students to develop a greater proficiency in the language while still enjoying a fun, stress-free environment. Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS), involves students in interactive stories. They are able to take the concrete vocabulary they acquired through basic TPR and use it when it is placed in contextual situations. It is by participating in these stories themselves and reading and writing new ones that students are able to eventually internalize the grammatical structures and abstract vocabulary of the story in the target language.

Unlike TPR, publications on newer methods like TPRS are currently limited to the occasional anecdotal article. Dr. James Davidheiser, 2005 President of TFLTA (Tennessee Foreign Language Teachers Association), is one of the few university professors who has had training in TPR and TPRS and actually uses both in his introductory German classes at Sewanee. In his article “The ABC’s of Total Physical Response Storytelling,” he gives a brief history of TPR and TPRS, summarizes some of the published research that supports TPR, and describes what happens in his TPRS classes. Some key people in the field of research to whom he refers are psycho-linguist Dr. Stephen Krashen, Dr. Valerian Postovsky, researcher at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, Dr. Tracey Terrell, one of the developers of the *Natural Approach* and Dr. Alice Omaggio Hadley. Krashen’s research, which concluded that second language (L2) learning comes from comprehensible input, echoed Asher’s own research stating that comprehension necessarily precedes production. Krashen continues to maintain that traditional methods which focus on grammatical correctness instead of meaningful communication raise a learner’s affective filter, resulting in a fear of making mistakes that ultimately prevents learning. Postovsky supports the idea that aural comprehension is preeminent and that premature oral practice only leads to short-term memory, resulting in rapid

loss of information. Terrell had similar research results while developing “natural” methods which involve comprehensible input, gradual reproduction, and stress-free learning. Omaggio-Hadley sees an evolution from Asher’s “direct method” of TPR to the natural methods developed by Terrell, Winitz, and Postovsky (46-47).

One of the most compelling pieces of research that supported Davidheiser’s experimentation with a novel method like TPRS was produced by his own institute. In a study conducted at the University of the South, an institute that he described as “rated highly selective and among the top 25 liberal arts colleges in the nation” (57) only 26% of the students surveyed were conceptual learners. The other 74% were experiential and creative learners. What amazed Davidheiser was that well over 90% of the faculty who were surveyed turned out to be conceptual learners, and conceptual learners, he noted, were prone to teach traditionally according to their own learning style “without taking account of the various learning styles of the students in their classes” (57). Thanks to the new *Center for Teaching*, which was created at his university to encourage experimentation in pedagogy, Davidheiser was able to secure grant money for training in TPRS and now gives workshops at professional conferences around the country.

As new methods arise, new conflicts among theorists and teachers arise: explicit versus implicit learning, form versus function, the role of input versus output, free versus controlled production, the grammar based syllabus versus the students’ internal syllabus; these are just a few of the issues circulating in the literature today noted by Dr. Rod Ellis in his *Principles of Instructed Language Learning*. Ellis, known as “The Father of Second Language Acquisition,” provides a conservative yet informed evaluation of the research on both sides of the currently unresolved issues in second language learning. He supports whole brain teaching, noting that research favors implicit teaching [communicative] over explicit [grammar based] to achieve fluency: “Given that it is implicit knowledge that underlies the ability to communicate fluently and confidently in an L2, it is this type of knowledge that should be the ultimate goal of any instructional program[me]” (4).

Despite the compelling research, language programs continue to adhere to traditional formats, as Krashen points out:

Currently, beginning foreign language classes are form-based. After one to two years, the program is typically devoted to reading the classics. Both of these approaches are frustrating. Few beginning foreign language students have an appreciation for grammar, and few intermediates are interested in, or prepared for classical literature (53).

In the meantime teachers and researchers around the world are struggling to address the problem of finding the most efficient means of helping students achieve fluency, yet all too often the polarities between the research and the actual teaching of languages have a negative impact on the most important person in the equation, the student.

MTSU: Leader in Innovative Language Acquisition

My initiation into the world of research started when I was awarded an URSCP grant to study TPR and TPRS with Dr. Shelley Thomas. As her former French student I enjoyed her style of teaching and knew that she was constantly involved in some sort of research, but I was not familiar with the methods she was using. She began mentoring me by introducing me to the

history of the methods and how they compared with what is generally known about the brain through works like Asher's *Learning another Language through Actions*, Blaine Ray's *Fluency through TPR Storytelling*, and Eric Jensen's *Brain-Based Learning*, which are the books required for her graduate course on methodology.

However, it was not until the spring semester of 2005, during a yearly regional workshop on TPR/TPRS held at MTSU, that the information really became personal for me. It was as though the classic cliché had actually happened – I felt like a light bulb had suddenly turned on above my head. The two-day workshop on TPR was led by Berty Segal, a textbook author and a professional consultant from California with over 25 years experience as a teacher-trainer of ESL (English as a Second Language) and FL (Foreign Language). I had my doubts about spending three consecutive days from 8:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. in one room with 30 city-school administrators and high school teachers, and perhaps the other teachers there had similar discouraging thoughts.

Nevertheless, as soon as Ms. Segal did a TPR demonstration in Yiddish, all doubts disappeared. She had the entire room of workshop participants (including myself) standing, sitting, turning, running, and hopping in a mere six minutes of Yiddish instruction, a language to which none of us had ever been exposed. Later on during the workshop, Elizabeth Skelton, another professional ESL/FL consultant from Colorado who works closely with Blaine Ray, demonstrated how to do content teaching. With content teaching, the teacher teaches whatever subject matter is required, but teaches it in a language other than the native language of the students and ideally makes it completely comprehensible. By using TPRS, Ms. Skelton incorporated key phrases from a science lesson into a story and taught us about light energy in German. Thanks to the effectiveness of the method, I still remember a difficult term like *durchsichtig*, which means transparent.

This summer I was able to continue my work with TPR and TPRS through my McNair Scholar's grant by attending the Summer Language Institute held at MTSU. Dr. Thomas created this institute from an MTSU *Special Projects Grant* in 2003. By participating as both a learner and an observer, I was able to get a first-hand experience of what I was researching. The classes were held for five consecutive days from 8:00 AM until 12:30 PM, and after each class I met with the other instructors to discuss what was working well and what improvements could be made. It was incredible because I knew I was directly contributing to the evolution of this teaching method by providing the unique perspective of a student/informed observer.

The first class I took was Spanish with Blaine Ray, the creator of TPRS. The most unique aspect of Blaine Ray's method is how he integrates useful vocabulary in bizarre and somewhat quirky stories that evoke humor-related emotions. Brain-based research shows that involving emotions in learning supports long-term retention of the information (Jensen 198-199). The stories often had to do with animals traveling around the world, all with simple problems that are resolved at the end. It is a very effective method which I had previously experienced in my French classes with Dr. Thomas. It allows learners to acquire not only vocabulary in context, but also grammar in context. Rather than staring at conjugation tables that seem as foreign and abstract as a math theorem before it is applied to solving a problem, students immediately put their target language to use. The goal of learning a language is to be able to communicate. In traditional language classes, however, this goal is sometimes, lost and forgotten under a tangled pile of grammar rules and spelling errors. If a student begins learning the language by being

involved in and communicating through contextual stories, the technicalities of a given language come more easily.

By the end of the five-day course, I was able to pick up Blaine Ray's Spanish novel *Pobre Ana* and read it all the way through. It was not really until then that I realized how much language I had actually acquired. Two months later in June, I attended the second session of the Summer Language Institute. I had already been exposed to both Spanish and French at some point, so instead of taking Spanish again, as I had originally planned, I went out on a limb and took Mandarin Chinese instead, a language about which I knew absolutely nothing. The two teachers were Dr. Susan Zhang and Linda Li, whom Dr. Thomas brought in from the Shanghai American School on the recommendation of Elizabeth Skelton. Ms. Skelton had just trained them both in TPR and TPRS two years prior to that.

This was by far the most fun I had with my research all summer. Each day we spent time with basic TPR that had us moving all around the room. We also created and acted out stories through TPRS. By the end of the week, not only could I understand an oral story, but I could read one, tell one, and write my own. The key here is that I had not *memorized* any set story nor was I simply able to *repeat* it, but I was able to actually pull from the vocabulary that I had acquired to *create* my own story with nearly perfect grammar, as far as elementary Chinese goes. It was a small class, consisting of students ranging from ages 12 to 72. It appeared that everyone in the class excelled and had fun doing it. Sophia Wentz, retired faculty member and former Dean of Faculty at St. Andrews-Sewanee School, was worried at first about tackling Mandarin in her seventies. However, after our five days under the instruction of Dr. Zhang and Mrs. Li, she enrolled in a Mandarin class at a university and said, "As I look forward to my university class this fall and look at the textbook, I am further convinced that TPR/TPRS are superior to textbook based learning... instead of feeling intimidated, you feel empowered."

As for myself, this class enabled me to learn enough Chinese to use it as a teaching demonstration of TPR during my final McNair presentation at the end of the summer. Further, I also decided to enroll in a Chinese class for the fall semester at MTSU. It is not a TPR or TPRS based class, but the 5-day language institute gave me enough background and confidence that I had no reservations about taking a language which I would have never otherwise considered possible for me to learn.

Since its beginning in 2003, the *Summer Language Institute* has brought in teachers and students from all over the country and world. The languages offered over the years have been Spanish, French, Russian, German, Mandarin, and English for the Hispanic community. Initial results of Blaine Ray's pilot class showed that people who had had zero Spanish averaged, as a group, right at second year high school Spanish on two nationally standardized tests: The National Spanish Test is administered to secondary schools across the nation and the Brigham Young placement test is housed in the MTSU lab in BDA. Dr. Thomas has been invited to present the results at both regional and national conferences, and as a result, MTSU has become a central hub for those either involved with or interested in TPR and TPRS. Although the results were impressive, Dr. Thomas has chosen not to publish them because they were not gathered from average high school or college students; they were gathered from a very small pool of highly motivated language teachers or professionals.

Sarah Moran, 2004 president of KWLA (Kentucky World Language Association), attended the MTSU Summer Language Institute in 2003 and scored into 4th semester college Spanish. Although she had never studied Spanish, Sarah is a French teacher who uses TPRS in her classes, so certain pathways in her brain had already been continually fired both in terms of

language and methodology. The important step of pre-learning was a key contributor to her rapid absorption of Spanish. Nevertheless, the implications are still compelling. Students who have studied another language and know how to play the TPRS game are showing similar rapid gains in Dr. Thomas's Honors classes.

Gloria Tapp, another former participant who had had no previous Spanish, is a project manager at Proctor and Gamble in Ohio. She is responsible for Instructional Technology projects all over the world with a focus in Latin America. She stated about her experience, "The class was a lot of fun, but it was also extremely beneficial. In only one week, I have learned enough so that I can read and understand an amazing amount of Spanish...I would also like to come back to MTSU again next year to learn more" ("Third Annual Summer Language Institute", 3). Although more highly motivated than the average student, Gloria is an example of another compelling point; the class resulted in the desire to continue learning the language, an important ingredient for keeping students motivated enough to continue learning until they reach proficiency.

The second year of the Institute, Dr. Thomas had a small pool of beginners orally tested by an O.P.I. (Oral Proficiency Interview), which is the official instrument of measuring oral proficiency for ACTFL (American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages). Participants tested anywhere from the novice low to novice high level, showing an increase of three levels in only 5 days. While consulting with other language institutes around the country, Dr. Thomas made the acquaintance of Helene Rassias, daughter of the famous Dartmouth professor who invented what is now known as the *Rassias* or *Dartmouth Method*. This method was eventually adopted by the Peace Corps during the sixties and entered mainstream university methodology classes where Dr. Thomas was first exposed to it in the late seventies. Helene Rassias now heads up her father's work and directs a 10-day language institute at Dartmouth. In a conversation with Dr. Thomas, she stated that she had not yet given nationally standardized written tests. She had, however, given occasional O.P.I. tests and stated that after 10 days, or 80 hours, the students tested showed gains of anywhere from one to three levels. These results did not exceed the results of the MTSU Summer Language Institute and they were gained after more than twice the number of hours.

Dr. Thomas's goals in forming the Language Institute were threefold: to look at the rapport between current brain research and new methods like TPR and TPRS, to provide accelerated language training for language students, and to provide a training ground for teachers who are interested in testing new teaching tools by allowing them to experience the effectiveness of new methods themselves in the classroom. Dr. Thomas is in the process of gathering data to contribute to the on-going body of research on brain-based learning in hopes of moving language teachers and researchers towards the most effective teaching methods. They may not turn out to be TPR/TPRS, but any method that involves the senses and makes comprehensible input relevant and contextual in an entertaining way has the ingredients that research points to as brain-compatible. Blaine Ray acknowledges the importance of MTSU's Summer Language Institute in the introduction of the fourth edition of his book *Fluency through TPRStorytelling*. In a personal e-mail to Dr. Thomas, Ray stated "MTSU will never know how much it has changed teaching in the United States."

In fact, the current changes have filtered into the community. In March of 2006, Dr. Thomas was approached by Dr. Stacey Borasky who had heard about the results of the Summer Language Institute. Dr. Borasky is the executive director of a 17 million dollar grant made up of a consortium of 12 other universities whose goal is to restructure and improve the Department of

Children's Social Services. She and Dr. Thomas have since formed a partnership to help bring Spanish language training to the 4,000 employees who work for the department. Dr. Thomas presented a proposal to the state commissioner for the creation of the new position of "language development specialist." The position was immediately approved and filled by Brian Roberts, a former graduate student from MTSU's M.A.T. program who was trained in TPR/TPRS. Roberts works as a type of satellite, giving five-day language trainings around the state similar to those of the Summer Language Institute.

One of the most exciting aspects of this partnership is the amount of data that will be available for analysis. Gathering data from TPRS classes has consistently been a major problem faced by researchers and advocates of TPRS due to the dearth of trained teachers, small pool of appropriate students, and availability of research facilities. Most TPR and TPRS classes are currently being taught by language teachers at the K-12 level. These teachers do not have the time or training to conduct proper research experiments. Language classes at the university level tend to be composed of people who have had previous language training in high school, so the pool of true beginners is extremely small for each language class. There is also the problem of finding any experienced university teachers who are trained in TPR/TPRS from whom data can be gathered. Finally, it is imperative that the amount and quality of input students receive in a TPR/TPRS class be monitored and tabulated, an impossible task unless the teachers are sticking to a well-planned script and there are faculty in the sciences who can properly analyze data.

Through the new partnership with the DCS, however, there is now a trained teacher with a script and a large pool of students who have had zero exposure to Spanish. As far as faculty interest from the sciences, Dr. Will Langston, specialist in the Psychology of Language at MTSU, began conducting experiments with his students and Dr. Thomas's GTAs who are trained in TPR and TPRS in the spring of 2006. After reading Asher's book on TPR he stated to Dr. Thomas in an e-mail, "using TPR to enhance acquisition of a second language would be consistent with current research on embodied cognition and other research in the field of cognitive psychology." There will be a considerable amount of data available in the coming years so that new, more extensive studies can be made.

TPR and TPRS have not been restricted to the United States. The two above-mentioned Chinese teachers whom Dr. Thomas brought in to teach at the Summer Language Institute use the methods year-round at their Shanghai American School, the largest international school in China. Dr. Susan Zhang, the director of the school, has been invited to give TPRS training workshops to Chinese teachers around the Southeast Asia area, including Hong Kong and Malaysia. She produces and has published her own teaching materials for the development of a complete curriculum. The results of her classes will soon become another source of research data.

On the other side of the globe, a non-profit organization called the Isha Foundation in Coimbatore, India heard about the results of the Summer Language Institute and invited Dr. Thomas to help them develop their language program. She piloted a language class for children in the nearby Thanakindi tribe in order to test the effectiveness of the new methods and see just how quickly tribal children could learn English. She has been invited to return next May. This is what Anasuya Menon at *The Hindu* reported on July 25, 2006, after observing the English class at the end of Dr. Thomas's stay:

These students were from tribal villages scattered in the foothills of the Poondi. They did not know English and some of them had not even

heard it being spoken before. Yet, they understood their teacher perfectly. Through actions, pictures, songs and short stories, they were initiated in the world of English.

Dr. Don Kiraly, author of *A Social-Constructivist Approach to Translator Education*, is a professor in Germesheim, Germany at the largest translator training institution in the world. For the past 20 years, he has provided intensive and extensive TPR courses in Hungarian and Latvian to give future language teachers the chance to learn a language in a non-conventional and holistic way. The current exchange program between Germesheim and MTSU enabled Kirsten Neuhoff, a German graduate student who attended MTSU, to get training in TPR and TPRS under Dr. Thomas. She is now teaching 5-day language institutes in Italian under the supervision of Dr. Kiraly. She recently wrote Dr. Thomas that the results of the Italian classes were so dramatic, she has been asked to teach introductory German classes at the university, classes which are usually taught exclusively by the professors.

A new TPRS list serve is one indication of how widespread interest is in these two methods on a global level. The list serve was created in 1999 by only a handful of TPR/TPRS users. Teachers from all over the world can now instantly get answers to their questions and share their findings, experiences, and materials. It currently boasts 4,301 members and continues to grow weekly. As more teachers learn these methods textbook companies like Prentice Hall, publisher of *Paso a Paso*, are responding to requests for a change in traditional textbooks by creating TPR/TPRS supplements. In 2002, the first question about TPRS appeared on the NBPTS, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, thus opening the door for innovations to enter into mainstream language classrooms.

Conclusion

The world of TPR and TPRS is an exciting one to be involved in – one that is constantly evolving and gaining momentum. The opportunities to continue my work seem endless. In the near future, I will put my research to practice and begin teaching a pilot ESL class to local Spanish-speakers during the spring semester of 2007. I will simultaneously be collecting and analyzing the data coming in from the DCS Spanish classes. Dr. Thomas has also asked me to join her in May of 2007 as she returns to India to continue training teachers there in TPR and TPRS. People have been learning languages for years, but as the research shows, it has been a fairly unsuccessful endeavor in the average classroom. As international interest and awareness continues to heighten exponentially, now is the ideal time to make a change for the better in the field of second language acquisition.

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- McChristian, M.K. PhD, Director of Languages Other Than English for the Richardson School District of Texas, did a study for a government grant that showed attrition rates of 94-100 percent in foreign language classrooms for Spanish, French and German. She sent a copy of the report to Dr. Shelley Thomas in 2002.
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